



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1406 Longworth House Office Building • Washington, D.C. 20515 • (202) 225-5506

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Contact: Stephanie Lundberg
Phone: 202-225-5506

Kind Amends Head Start to Block Hasty Implementation of "Untested" Standardized Tests

Stakes High to Ensure Tests are Best-Suited to Assess Child Development

Washington, DC –The U.S. House passed an amendment today authored by U.S. Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) to ensure the effectiveness of standardized testing for Head Start, the federal early education program that currently helps more than 13,000 Wisconsin children. Kind's amendment suspends the implementation of a new testing plan for Head Start children until the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) completes an assessment of the plan's ability to measure child progress and program performance. Kind, who is concerned that the testing measures were hastily prepared and not properly reviewed, is responsible for legislation commissioning the NAS assessment.

"Ongoing evaluations of Head Start are effective tools to ensure school readiness, but we need to ensure these assessments are well-designed or they could have severe consequences for this vulnerable group of children," stated Kind, a member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. "These specific tests were developed behind closed doors and with very little input from child development experts, Congress, or Head Start Centers. Until child development and early education experts can agree about the appropriateness of the testing measures, we should not be spending millions of dollars on its implementation and subjecting 500,000 children to it every year."

In April 2002, the Department of Health and Human Services created the Head Start National Reporting System to assess the progress of Head Start children in early literacy, language, and number knowledge skills. Early child educators and experts, however, have complained the testing plan was rushed into place and may incorrectly evaluate children. In May, the Government Accountability Organization released a report echoing these concerns stating: *"Based on our analysis and that of the Technical Working Group and independent experts, we continue to believe that further study is necessary to ensure that the NRS results are reliable and valid and the results are appropriate for the intended purposes."*

"The NRS is not a valid assessment tool and was thrust upon Head Start programs without proper review," said Dan Stickler, Director of Western Dairyland Head Start. "If the intent is to measure children's progress, we're already doing that with child outcome measures. We are not opposed to greater accountability. The NRS has been a misguided effort because of the hurried manner in which it was undertaken. Congressman Kind's amendment will allow early childhood experts to evaluate the entire process and make sure that we all do what is best for the children in our programs. We need to use a developmentally appropriate assessment tool which accurately measures progress in all developmental areas."